

WALTER HYDE DILLINGHAM

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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(1908 -)

Walter Dillingham, the oldest living descendant of Benjamin Franklin Dillingham, describes his early childhood and his education at Punahou School, followed by his mainland education at Montezuma Mountain School in California and the University of Washington.

Mr. Dillingham's early interest in flying led to his appointment to the then Air Corps flying school at Randolph Field, Texas. An active reservist at the outbreak of World War II, he recounts his military experiences during that period.

As an active real estate broker since the late 1930s, Mr. Dillingham comments on the changes he has observed in that field, as well as other aspects of life in Hawaii, over the past five decades.

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INTERVIEW WITH WALTER HYDE DILLINGHAM

At his Century Center office, Honolulu, Hawaii

November 20, 1986

D: Walter Dillingham

S: Alice Sinesky, Interviewer

D: I was born in the great, good year of 1908, on November 23, 1908, which is a lot of years ago. The event took place on Beretania Street at one of the three homes that my grandfather had given to his children. They were located right next to what is now the Central Union Church. Grandfather had his original house right where the church now stands and next door on the Koko Head side was my father's house, and my Auntie Marion (Mrs. John Erdman) had her family next door to my father's. That would be bordering on Alexander Street. My uncle Walter Dillingham had his house between my grandfather's house and Punahou Street where there are now some other church buildings.

Then we went to Punahou School on bicycles because our grandfather had--I think it was about fifteen acres where the church now stands and we had a lot of room to ride bicycles between the three families' homes. Oh, originally the property where the church is now was called Woodlawn. That was one of the things that my grandfather Benjamin Franklin Dillingham had started up in back of Manoa. Deep in Manoa, was the Woodlawn Stock and Dairy. Then my grandparents moved down to Beretania Street and this automatically got called Woodlawn.

S: What about brothers and sisters? Where did you rank in the family?

D: Well, I'm the oldest Dillingham grandson of Benjamin Franklin Dillingham, my father having had five boys, no daughters. So I'm the oldest Dillingham. My father's sister Marion had Harold first, then Louise, Dorothy and Marjory.

S: And you were the oldest in your family?

D: Yes, I'm the oldest of my father's family. I guess I'm the oldest living Dillingham descendant of Benjamin Franklin

Dillingham. I had four brothers; Harold, Jr.; Henley, who died a number of years ago; my brother Bayard, who died last year and then my brother Peter. There were the five of us.

We played a great deal as children with Lowell and Ben and Gay. Betty Lou was the youngest of Walter Dillingham's family. Betty Lou now lives on the East Coast of the United States. Gaylord, bless his heart, became a pilot in the Air Force and was shot down over Japan while he was piloting a B-29 about one week before the war ended with the atom bomb.

Let's go back to Punahou School. After Punahou School I went to Montezuma Mountain School for Boys which prepared me for the University of Washington where I entered in 1927 and was graduated in 1931, at which time I was able to earn a commission in the Infantry Reserve by studying in the ROTC. It was a good thing that I had that because I was still holding my commission as a second lieutenant in the Infantry when an opportunity presented itself to go to the Air Force flying school at Randolph Field, Texas, which at that time was noted as the "West Point of the Air."

S: Oh, yes. Do you recall what year that was?

D: Yes, I got my appointment in 1935 and we had to get on a government transport to sail to San Francisco and then got on a train and went to Texas for duty where I was graduated as a fighter pilot. In those days we called it a pursuit pilot. I was graduated from there in February of 1937, and was required to do three years of active duty which I completed at the end of 1939, but I kept my reserve commission. I had to do inactive duty training between 1939 and was performing that duty when the Japanese hit us at Pearl Harbor.

That was another interesting story because while I was on inactive duty, I still did a lot of flying as a reserve officer several times a week.

S: And this was here in Honolulu?

D: Yes, and even though I'd gone off duty and was not drawing any pay as such, the government did allow me, because I loved to fly so much, to fly with the Air Corps, as it was known then, the minimum amount of times I had to put in to stay qualified as a flyer. They didn't pay me for that but I was just as happy they didn't because I could come and go as I saw fit. Fly if I wanted to, and don't fly if I didn't want.

Because I had kept my proficiency up, when we were hit by the Japanese on December 7, 1941, I was recalled to duty two days later. On that day--the night before was a Saturday night and I had been down at a party on the other side of the

Island. The roads in those days were very narrow and winding and as I was coming home from the party I happened to pass Hickam Field about eleven o'clock at night. I was tired and I thought I'd use that as an excuse to go and bunk in with one of my buddies at Hickam Field.

I drove into Hickam Field gate still dressed in a tuxedo. I went in, rapped on the door of my flying partner's house. He invited me to stay the night. I said, "That'll be fine and I'd like if you could wake me at a little after seven o'clock because I am in the real estate business and I have to show some property at ten o'clock. If you could wake me about seven or seven-thirty, that would be fine."

So he came and awakened me about seven o'clock and we had coffee together, then I got in my car and started home. At about the time that I left it was about a quarter of eight or ten minutes to eight on the morning of December 7. I heard a lot of crashing and banging and explosions going on and wondered what that could possibly be. As I approached the front gate, I heard a lot of real heavy banging going and the airplanes started by and I thought, "My word, they look like a movie's being made," because they had Japanese insignia on them.

About that moment I got to the front gate and the little guard there apparently still didn't know what was going on and seeing me in a tuxedo (even though it was rumpled from having slept in it all night, still it was an officer's uniform) he recognized me as an officer, saluted me and passed me out the gate.

I got about 100 yards outside the gate when I was buzzed by what I thought was one of my old buddies in what looked like an AT-6, which was a training plane, but as it came by I heard some machine guns firing and some bullets whizzed right past my left ear and went thudding into the macadam road in front of me. I thought, "My word, they're being pretty realistic about these movies," so I rolled my window down, stuck my head out thinking it was one of my buddies having a little unauthorized fun and started to shake my fist at him when he banked over and as he banked over to turn away and head back towards Pearl Harbor I could see on the wings of his plane the Japanese insignia.

I said, "God, we must be under some kind of an attack here." I flipped on the radio and there was Webley Edwards saying, "This is the real thing. Pearl Harbor is under attack. Take cover. This is the real thing. It is not a rehearsal (of which we'd had many up to that time)."

I just raced home as fast as I could to my dad's home on the beach at Diamond Head, ran to the phone and, lo and

behold, I immediately was able to get an operator and I said, "Get me General Davidson," who was commanding the fighters. I got him on the line and I told him who I was. I said, "If you can use me this morning, I'll come right down," and I was very chagrined when he said, "Walter, I'm very sorry but we have more pilots than we have airplanes right now so you stay right where you are and we'll call you as soon as we can cut orders for you."

I went back in the house and watched the smoke going up from Pearl Harbor and planes flying over and a lot of antiaircraft shooting up at them, but they seemed to be missing by miles because I didn't see any get shot down.

To make a long story short, I was there for about two days when I called again and said, "You've got to have something for me to do if there's a war on. I just can't sit here." I was sent down to, of all places, the post office in downtown Honolulu. They said, "Go over and see this major over there and he will give you something to do." I went over and saw this major and he said, "Oh sure, Dillingham, we can use you. Sit down at that desk." I thought that was funny. What am I going to be doing at a desk when they've got airplanes flying around up here?

He hands me this big pile of papers and says, "Do this. Censor these letters." I said, "For heaven's sake, what are you talking about? You've got all kinds of people who can censor these letters. They don't even have to be military people. They can be trusted civilians. This is ridiculous." I almost told him, "Nothing doing," and walked out, but then I might have gotten in trouble if that was where I was told to go. Later that afternoon I went through a lot of stupid reading of people's letters.

I called again when I went home. I called the general again. He said, "Never mind. You don't have to go down there. We'll get orders for you, probably tomorrow." Orders came the next day--this is two days after the attack. I immediately went down to Wheeler Field and checked in and was in the war then for the next five years. I ended up by going down to the Marshall Islands where they took me out of a fighter squadron and put me on Kwajalein Island and, eventually, made me the commanding officer of about 800 troops on that island where we operated a small squadron of fighter planes for the Navy and Marines, in addition to operating a combat repair station.

I stayed there for about two solid years when General "Miff" Harmon came through and saw me and said, "Dillingham, you look awful thin. How long have you been here?" I said, "Two years, sir." He said, "Have you been eating right?" I told him what we had to eat. "What do you weigh now?" I

told him that as of that morning--I just happened to go in and weigh myself that morning at the medic's office of this island, which is a mile long and about half a mile wide--I weighed 106 pounds. (laughs) I was on active duty and flying, now and then in fighter planes in combat, but they finally said, "That's too much." The next day General Millard Harmon, who was, I believe, at Kelley Field as an instructor or administrator there, ordered me out to come back to Honolulu for duty where I was until the war ended.

S: Did they fatten you up when they got you back here?

D: No. (laughter) Well, a little bit. I probably weigh about 125 or 130 now or something like that. At any rate, I enjoyed my military career. It had a lot of ramifications. Some of it was tough and some wasn't. It was all right.

After that I came back and went off duty in ... I've forgotten what year that was.

S: Well, the war was over in 1945.

D: It was about 1946 they let me go off duty but I stayed in the reserves for three more years. I went down twice a week to Hickam Field; once to do a desk job for what they called a mobilization day possible assignment, to which I would be ordered immediately if we were attacked again. The rest of the time to keep my proficiency up I had to do a lot of flying with the squadron--so many hours a month minimum. That kept up my proficiency.

S: Did you fly on your own, too? As a civilian pilot?

D: Oh, yes. Just before the war broke I did buy a private plane and I got special permission to fly to Wheeler Field from Honolulu, which I asked to do because it saved a lot of time if you could start out in your car and get as far as Honolulu Airport, and then get in a plane and fly down to Wheeler Field and park my plane there in a hangar. I was even allowed to put my plane in a hangar if it was looked over by one of the GI maintenance men. In the afternoon when the day was over, I'd get into my plane, fly back to Honolulu and get into my car and get home. That was kind of fun. But that was a long time ago.

After that I went into my own real estate business. I've been in it ever since--to date.

S: That's about forty years.

D: Pretty near. I got my real estate license in 1939, and after the war resumed my real estate activities. Now

I've sort of eased off in doing real estate. I'm taking care of financial affairs for my family and me and that seems to be my story so far.

S: Let's backtrack a little because I'd like to hear a little more about your early years. You grew up in this close family situation with a lot of cousins around. I'd like to know what you did for fun in those days and to what extent you participated in the family's social life and about some people you met.

D: Well, we played tennis. And, oh yes, my uncle was an ardent polo player and he got me interested in playing a little polo at Kapiolani Park. Kapiolani Park is no longer a polo field but thereby hangs another interesting anecdote. Prince Edward the Eighth, the one who gave up his throne to marry Wallis Simpson, was a young fellow then. He was a friend of my father and his brother, Walter Dillingham, and he wanted to play polo one day with them. I was about fifteen years old if I recollect properly. The only polo clothes that he could fit into--the boots, britches, helmet and so on--were my clothes. He tried on many because he never was a very big fellow. So my claim to fame there is that the Prince of Wales wore my polo helmet and my britches. I often thought that I don't know that I'd have wanted to be wearing his britches later on in his life. It was interesting meeting him.

S: Did you do much horseback riding other than the polo?

D: I didn't do that extensively because I never was very fond of it. We did a lot of tennis and I do a lot of scuba diving and swimming and snorkeling and all that stuff. We still swim. I live at the tip of Diamond Head in a little condominium there. During the passing years I got married and had a daughter, Deborah, and she's married and has two children. I have two little grandsons at this date aged about three and six.

S: Do they live here?

D: No, they live in San Francisco and their father is a very successful stockbroker with Kidder, Peabody. For the last two summers they've been coming over and spending the summer with me and we do a lot of swimming together. I've encouraged my two grandsons to go swimming although they're still a bit nervous because they weren't born here and didn't get used to it and learn to swim as well as their mother did. They're coming along and one of these days we'll have quite a nice rapport.

S: Well, you went to Punahou first and then to Montezuma. What grade had you finished at Punahou when you left for Montezuma?

- D: To go further back. I was at Punahou for a while and then my mother and father decided for some reason or other that they wanted me to go to Hanahauoli School. I was there for, I believe, one year and then my mother got the idea that it might be nice to go to the mainland to boarding school instead of going to high school here, so I went to Hanahauoli School through the seventh grade, back to Punahou for the eighth grade and my freshman and sophomore years. It was in 1925 and 1926 that I went to Montezuma Mountain School for Boys in Los Gatos, California, for two years. I finished as a senior there in 1927, went to the University of Washington and was graduated from there in 1931.
- S: There were quite a few fellows from here who went to Montezuma, weren't there?
- D: Oh yes, sure. My cousin Lowell was there; Richard Kimball was there; Newton Campbell was there. They were there when I left. I don't know if any of them stayed after I left. I'm not sure.
- S: Had your family travelled to the mainland before you went to school there? Did the family do much travelling?
- D: Yes, my mother took my next younger brother Harold and me on a trip to Europe. I've forgotten what year it was now, but I think I was about twenty or twenty-one and Harold was about eighteen or nineteen. We visited Paris and that was about it.
- S: I was interested to know if you had been to the mainland before you went to school there.
- D: I did not go and stay for a long time until I went to Montezuma.
- S: You never had any desire to stay on the mainland?
- D: (laughs) I would never live anywhere but here. I even asked the Air Force once--they were calling for people to get permanent commissions in the Air Force--and I said that I would be interested in that if they would give me a permanent station in Hawaii. They all laughed at me and I knew they would. Nobody gets a permanent station anywhere.
- S: I've talked to a lot of people who said they wouldn't consider living any place else.
- D: I've been out of here many times. I've gone to the Orient two or three times; I've been to Europe twice; and a place that I like very much is the Cook Islands and Rarotonga--a tiny island--you can ride a little one-seat

scooter around the entire island in about twenty-five minutes. It has a high mountain on one end and has a nice airport partly covered with clover which gives off a fresh fragrance when the tires touch down on the clover. I wouldn't want to fly in there at night on a tiny island like that with a 4,000 foot mountain there, but it does have some beautiful beaches. It's a wonderful place to be. I'd like to go back there except for the fact that they don't permit foreigners to buy property there.

My friend Donn Beachcomber lives over there, but I think he has permission to stay there. You have to leave every thirty days or get an extension, but he's there, I believe, under a deal where he has a lease for two years at a time on somebody's property there.

S: Would you like to talk some about the real estate business since you've been in it for some forty years?

D: I don't have much to say about that because I never was in the development phase. I was always a broker, that's all. Buying and selling of existing homesites. I've had as many as nine salemen working for me and I had an office for a couple of years at one time down in the Dillingham Building. Later on we kind of fell on tough times and some of the salesmen weren't making enough money to be happy so they drifted off. I still hold my license now so I'm qualified to sell property if I want to bother with it.

I guess at the present time the real estate market as far as renting is pretty good here in the Waikiki area, but buying and then selling right now seems to me not the way to make money. I remember the time three, four or five years ago when all you had to do was buy a piece of property and hold it for six months or some ridiculous short time and then sell it for more than you paid for it. That's when we had real high rates of inflation, but now we don't.

S: And with the new tax laws everybody's sitting back and waiting to see how it affects them.

D: Of course. People should buy homes now because they're not too high-priced and keep them for their own personal use. I wouldn't object to that for myself. If I wanted to buy a house, I'd go and get it provided I could get the mortgage payments and so on, but interest rates are down now so they're within a realistic range.

S: Yes, because with all the changes owning your own home still seems pretty basic and as long as they allow that tax deduction it's the smart thing to do.

D: Yes, that would be all right, but I don't know as far as the real estate business is concerned that I would want to

buy something with the expectation of making a quick killing by reselling at much more in a short time.

S: As you said, there was a time when you could do it, but not now.

D: A long term investment in real estate is a good thing. You can't help it. There's no way the land will disappear with more and more people coming over here all the time.

S: Did you have any hobbies besides flying?

D: Oh yes, I used to sail with my father. He bought a schooner from one Al Christy of the Christy Comedies. He bought one called the Manuiwa and it's a sixty-five foot racing schooner. He loved sailing so much that he decided to go into the Trans-Pacific Yacht Race (I've forgotten what year now), but that year he won it as being the only Hawaiian entry to ever win the Trans-Pacific yacht race. In other words, being the only one who lived in Hawaii who won the Trans-Pacific yacht race. Since then nobody from Hawaii's done it.

I used to sail with him quite a bit, but I like flying better. (laughs) A lot better. You don't get soaking wet and you're sitting up there trying to pull in jibs. Dad would sit in the back and say, "Hurry up, we've got to come about." "Yeah, Dad, but I'm so cold up here that I've got to unwrap my fingers from around these halyards or the sheets with the jibs. I'm doing it as fast as I can." It would get so cold that I'd be glad when a wave splashed over me because the water would be warmer than the wind off Diamond Head and Koko Head.

S: Sailing's hard work.

D: It is indeed! It's fun. A lot of people love it. I don't understand these people going in a small boat thirty-five or forty feet or less--going all the way to Tahiti and spending thirty days on route there and you have to share a warm bed with somebody because it's so small and you can't all sleep at once because somebody's got to stay on watch. Oh no, thank you very much.

S: You sailed with your father and then...

D: I didn't sail with father on the Trans-Pacific yacht race. I was away at school then.

S: Did you come home from school every summer and did you work then?

D: Yes, every summer. I worked and one year in order to buy a car that my father didn't think I ought to have I

worked in a service station and I didn't tell him. I pumped gas there, but one day while I had my little Ford...I bought a little car for fifty bucks. Fifty dollars is all I paid for a Model-T Ford that towards the end of the year that I had it the top unravelled pretty bad so that when I took girls out to the Olympic Hotel in Seattle--I'd put a tuxedo on and sometimes you'd come out of the dinner party and on the way home you'd find that the car was full of snow. You had to brush it out and get some kind of cover. I'd give my date my overcoat so that she wouldn't freeze and, of course, I froze all the way home. (laughter) That was kind of funny.

S: You worked at a service station here in Honolulu?

D: No, while I was going through college because...What happened was that I worked in the gas station and got this automobile and it pulled away from the pump one day. The station was on kind of a slope and the Model-T handbrakes weren't very good sometimes so it started to roll away from the pump and the hose was still in the tank and as the car pulled away it caught and pulled the hose off the pump.

The station manager didn't like that and got my license number and wrote to my father and told him what his son had been doing up there. He wanted payment. I think he wanted about \$75 or some terrible big sum, which was more than I paid for the car, to fix his stupid old pump. That's how father found out about it and I was only halfway through college and he said, "Well, you'd probably receive much better grades if you paid less time to fooling around."

Another thing. I had started a flying club about that time because I wanted to fly. Being in the ROTC, when I got my commission, they did have a branch ROTC Air Corps. I took about six months of that for that section of my training but I still had to graduate as a lieutenant in the Infantry. Dad said, "Well, if you really want to fly, you give up that automobile and quit flying up there, which is probably very dangerous, and I will help you get good basic instruction instead of somebody's Mickey Mouse type of instruction." Dad wanted me to to the Air Corps flying school. I applied and fortunately was able to get into the school.

S: Oh, so you had your private license before you went to Texas?

D: No, I did not have a private license but I did fly around and I had a kind of a permit to fly, but I didn't have a permit to carry any passengers.

S: But you had the instruction. That was pretty early in the game. Were a lot of people interested in flying at that point?

D: We were trying. We wanted to get this plane. We wanted to buy it so I called next door. See, I was a member of Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity, SAE, and two doors down was the rich girls' Kappa Kappa Gamma--they were rich in those days--and I was able with another fellow to get one or two girls from there to come out and take some pictures to try to publicize the fact that we were trying to organize a flying club.

Another thing that my father found out about was my interest in flying. One of these girls that might have joined the flying club was in front of this little airplane and they had me put some kind of a helmet on her and I pointed out to her what a sparkplug was and what a cylinder was. Somebody took that picture and there was a little publicity on the campus that a club was being formed by Walter Dillingham and one or two others.

They came out and took a picture and that picture hit the national rotogravure section of all the Sunday papers. In those days the picture section was in sepia tones, brown colors. The picture came out rather clearly and an aunt of mine who lived in Boston saw it and clipped it out and sent it home to my mother and said, "Isn't this interesting what Walter's doing?" Of course, Father saw that and hit the ceiling. (laughter) That's when he said, "You've got to quit this flying."

S: When you were growing up were your parents strict disciplinarians? Your father sounds as if he might have been.

D: Father was a very strict disciplinarian; Mother was not, but Father was for which I am duly grateful because I don't think anybody could respect a father more than I do mine. I think he was one of the great men that came out of Hawaii or lived in Hawaii. Put it that way.

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S: I was interested in where you lived after the Punahou home.

D: Father bought that property at Diamond Head that is now turned into a park. Just before you get to the lighthouse. It's 3187 Diamond Head Road. You go along Diamond Head Road and just before you hit the first rise--it used to have a big white cement wall going along, but now that's down--and now they just have a wire fence. But Father had a nice home there. It's kind of interesting that he bought a lot and there were one after the other three or four lots owned by a man by the name of Gurry. Father bought one of them for a ridiculous sum. He lived there and the house next door

burnt down so he bought that lot and put the two of them together. Right on the sea there. Believe it or not, the lot next to that one caught fire (laughs) and Father bought that. People were wondering if Father was a pyromaniac or something. (laughs)

With that lot there was room enough to put a tennis court on one side and a swimming pool on the other. Then he built this house of bluestone granite rock, which came down from, I believe, some part of Mauna Kea. Real bluestone rock. Great big square chunks. He built this house that even a strong earthquake couldn't knock down. The whole house at that time (and it was 100 feet square so there was 10,000 feet under the floor of the house with a tennis court on one side and a swimming pool on the other) was built for \$80,000. It's unheard of. You couldn't begin to do just the front door for that kind of a price now.

S: Do you remember what year that was?

D: I suppose that must have been about 1923 or 1924. Something like that. I remember that Barbara Hutton was a great friend of my mother's. She used to come and spend time with us there. It was interesting. We had lots of nice parties there.

S: Your parents did a lot of entertaining in those days?

D: Yes, we did quite a bit. Every Wednesday night friends of my father and mother would come in. They formed what they called the Prickly Heat Quartet. Father sang and Reynolds McGrew, Bob Purvis and, I think, a fellow named Bogardus and one Alfred Afong whose daughter was Mary of Carol and Mary. They had pretty good voices. We used to have as many as forty or fifty people come in for cocktails and a buffet dinner and have them sing. It was too bad that we didn't have recording machines in those days. I'd love to have some of those. They were doing a lot of barbershop singing.

S: Did the rest of the family enjoy music? Did anybody play the guitar or ukulele or sing?

D: Well, yes, I could play ukulele pretty well and my brother plays the steel guitar very well.

S: Oh yes, Peter.

D: He has his own quartet now and he's made a couple of recordings.

S: So the whole family was musical to a certain extent.

D: Well, my father composed a few little songs on the piano, but my mother was not. My mother was artistically

bent in painting. She did some beautiful paintings. I couldn't draw a straight line without a ruler, but she did some very beautiful paintings. She wasn't musical at all. She couldn't carry a tune in a basket. But Father could do that and he had a nice voice.

S: They were pretty much involved in community activities?

D: Yes, my mother was. Her first name was Margaret. Margaret Dillingham, who was born and brought up as a Catholic, was head of the Catholic orphanage for many years. She sort of ran that for a while.

S: Were you raised as Catholics?

D: Yes, but Father, being an ardent sailor, didn't quite follow it. He didn't care. He permitted it. All five of us were baptized as Catholics, but I guess as sure as hell I'm condemned to hell because I'm not very devout I'm afraid. (laughs) I don't go to church nearly enough as I should and sometimes I don't go to church maybe only once or twice a year.

If I feel that I need some religious stimulation, I would go and get in my airplane early in the morning when the air was still and crisp and cold, and fly out towards Koko Head and down the north shore past Kaneohe and fly up along the ridges of the mountains and just marvel at the beauties of nature in the quiet of the early morning when everything is so beautiful. I'd sit up looking at the beautiful blue water splashing on the side of the cliffs. It made me feel very humble and small and grateful to be alive so that I could see it.

I didn't think that I needed to go inside of four walls with a lot of hot people who don't smell too well. I liked that fresh air and I'd thank God for being alive and giving me the ability to fly and the ability to see it.

S: I have a feeling you probably communicated better with God than a lot of those people inside the four walls.

D: (laughs) Maybe. I don't know. I love God and I believe in God, but it doesn't necessarily follow that we have to go to any particular ritual. I mean people who believe in Buddha are probably just as devout. It's just so beautiful over here that you thank providence or God or whoever it is who created me that I can see it. I thank God every day of life to be alive. I don't have to wait until Sunday to go to church.

S: And today's November 20 so on Sunday it will be seventy-eight years. Happy birthday.

D: Thank you. (laughs) I still go scuba diving and flying and all that business yet.

S: I like to ask people who have lived here for many years and who have seen so many changes what they think lies ahead for Hawaii.

D: I just hope that it doesn't get any more populace. I think we have enough people here now. A way back in the late twenties and early thirties were the days when we really had fun running around here. You could go down to the beach and not be jammed in with a million people. Of course, I can remember when the duck ponds in Waikiki were just swamps. Where you and I are sitting right now we could look right down and look at the six-lane Kalakaua Avenue and marvel at the heavy traffic which at that time you could walk across that street any time you wanted to. There were times, of course, when we never locked the front door of our house at Diamond Head. You could go off for days, go off for a weekend and leave the doors open. You wouldn't dare do that now. (laughs) That's what I remember.

I remember all that business long before the Ala Wai Canal was built. I think that it's good that they've come in because I like the modern conveniences, the good restaurants, the movies and the theaters, but I'd just as soon go back to Rarotonga where they have one nice hotel which is just about the equivalent of what the Royal Hawaiian was here at that time. It's really not the equivalent but it's a nice hotel. Or maybe like the old Halekulani or something like that. It's nice to have those things, but I really don't want any more people. I think we have enough. Too many people here now.

S: At this stage of the game we seem to be almost totally dependent on tourism and the military and it makes you wonder what lies ahead.

D: Well, we'd be in real trouble if we didn't have the tourists, of course. But then if we didn't have them, maybe we wouldn't need them. The sugar business is gone, practically, as far as I can see. Maybe macadamia nuts and pineapple will hold it but it's pretty hard to know what to do. That's why I say I liked it in the old days when sugar was important and you had steamers coming in instead of airplanes. When you'd meet the steamer and people would come out with leis, and when the steamers left--the romantic pulling away from the dock slowly and the waving of leis and all that as people left. That is now gone forever; it will never be back again.

S: Those were the golden days, I guess.

D: As they say, the old order changes at the end of an era.

S: Did you have any particularly close friends that you socialized with?

D: I did indeed, but some of them are not here any more. There was George Cooke who was a great friend of my father and his son George Paul Cooke, Jr. We used to call him Peppi. He and I were very close friends and they would have me over to visit on Molokai. I'd go over and spend a month or so with them in the summertime. It was kind of fun.

S: Peppi was active in politics, was he not?

D: No, his father was president of the Senate one year. No, Peppi never got into politics.

S: Were you ever interested in politics?

D: Yes, I was a member of the Legislature. I forgot about that. I got elected to the Legislature about 1939 or 1940 and I got a nice overwhelming--surprising shall we say--vote and I think I was the second highest vote and I got elected to the House of Representatives from what was then the Fourth District.

S: What area did that encompass at that time?

D: The eastern end of Honolulu. Let's put the boundary line, roughly, from Honolulu Harbor up over the Pali and down to Kailua. That part of the Island was the Fourth District. Then I got elected again. One time, I guess just before World War II started, the governor called a special session. I served in the regular session and then when that was over the war was imminent so the governor called a special session and I was called to that so that would be my third, so I was in the Legislature for three sessions. That was to consider what was known as the M-Day bill, meaning the Mobilization Day bill, and what would happen in the event we were attacked.

The last thing I did in the Legislature was to promote the M-Day bill, which involved the Dillingham wharfs, including Pier 15. We owned it but Matson wanted the state to take it over and lease it directly to Matson. We owned the piers and charged them to use the piers. They wanted to take it away from us. The impasse over Pier 15 was settled when the M-Day bill session was called by the Legislature after the members agreed that the question of Pier 15 would not be brought to a vote.

S: It sounds from what you've said about the Mobilization Day bill that they were thinking in terms of war, but when they were actually attacked, everybody seems to have been caught completely off guard.

D: (laughs) So was the military.

S: That's what I mean: everybody.

D: That brings up another bone of contention. People are still saying that Mr. Roosevelt did know they were going to attack and was happy they did because that gave him a chance to perpetuate himself in office. I don't think he ever intended or would want to see all those people killed who died during the Pearl Harbor attack or during the war, but I think he was kind of glad that the attack did occur.

S: Well, of course, there are two schools of thought on that. John Toland wrote Day of Infamy and maintains that Roosevelt did know and on the other hand you have Gordon Prange who wrote At Dawn We Slept and he takes the opposite viewpoint. I guess it's one of those things we'll never know.

But the population here really rallied once the attack took place.

D: Surely. I remember one of my men in the Legislature, Tommy Sakakihara, because he was Japanese, was picked up and thrown in a concentration camp at Honouliuli on the edge of Pearl Harbor and, God, I was embarrassed because he would write these pathetic letters addressed to me: "Walter, I helped you on the Pier 15 fight in the Legislature. Now I need help. Get me out of here."

I went to my father and said, "What shall I do? Hell, I'm a second lieutenant in the Air Corps and I don't have anything to do with his being thrown in jail." I couldn't do anything at all and I don't think he ever quite forgave me for not coming to his aid. I think they kept him for a long time and as a result he got arthritis or something and had to walk with a cane for the rest of his life. I don't know why he didn't sue the government for that.

S: Did they keep him here or send him to the mainland?

D: A lot of them went to the mainland but he stayed here. Then I think they let him out of confinement a little while before the war ended. But, God, I was embarrassed. I thought I should go to Tommy because I know damn well that he wouldn't deliberately turn us in or betray us, but what the hell could I do? I wasn't in power. Maybe he thought that my father had more power, but my father didn't have any power.

S: Not when it came to something like that.

D: Even my uncle who had a lot of influence in Honolulu--I don't think he could have done anything about that.

S: No, that was something that was above and beyond politics. It was just the way it was.

How did you feel about the martial law being imposed?

D: Well, I guess it was a good thing. It got to be a damn nuisance because I'd be flying at night--at two o'clock in the morning--and there's supposed to be a blackout all over the Island, but here's Pearl Harbor brightly lighted. You could see it from a hundred miles away. If the light was on, any submarine could just guide off that glow if nothing else in the sky. I guess the idea was to control the population--keep them off the streets and out of the bars as they say.

S: Well, they had so much construction going on at Pearl Harbor after the attack, twenty-four hours a day with the welding and all, it seems funny that they'd walk two miles up a hill to tell somebody their window blind was up an inch.

D: Even when I was home--I didn't get arrested because I had my uniform on--I left my blind open one night. After the war started I was living at Bellows Field. That was one of the first jobs I had after the war broke. We had just gotten married at that time and we were right on the beach. But, hell, we had those boxes hanging over us. There was no light shining out to sea. It just kind of glowed out on the ground, but they'd make us cover that up. Pretty ridiculous.

S: You were married right before the war started?

D: No, we were married about six months after the war started.

S: What was your wife's name and how did you meet her?

D: My wife's name was Ruth Keller, who I met by fortunately seeing a friend of mine drive by with two beautiful girls. I called him and he told me one was his wife and the other one his wife's sister. To make a long story short, he introduced me to Ruth. We had several dates when I had to go on an emergency business trip to California. We had a date to have dinner on a Saturday when I expected to be back on Pan American.

After I was in California a day or two Pan American called and expressed their regrets but they were unable to

take me back to Honolulu due to the pressure of the government commandeering all airplanes to Hawaii to carry defense workers. I called Ruth and told her, "I'm not going to be able to keep our date Saturday night and I'm not sure just when I will be back, but I will be coming back as soon as I can get transportation on one of the Matson ships."

I was able to get the last room on the Lurline, which was due to arrive in Honolulu about the 5th of December. I boarded the ship for Honolulu and the second day out on the way back from Los Angeles to Honolulu the steward came up to me and said he had a message for me from a very beautiful lady.

The message was from Ruth and she said that she was of the opinion that I was not interested in the date and was doing something else, so she decided that she would go back home to San Francisco. In those days before the war, the Lurline would make a routine trip from Honolulu to San Francisco to Los Angeles and then back to Honolulu. After I read her message, I immediately got on the ship-to-shore telephone and asked her why she was up there when we had a date in three or four more days. I convinced her that she should come back to Honolulu. She said she would do her best to turn around and come back.

My ship arrived in Honolulu on December 5th; the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on the 7th.

S: So you were back here, she was in San Francisco and the war broke out.

D: The war is now on. I was able through a friend of mine in the Navy to have the use of a telephone to call Ruth and tell her how she could get back. I received permission from Admiral Nimitz for her to come back on a convoy. She said, "Well, do you think that's a good idea?" I said, "Yes, I think so, but the thing is that for you to come back to Honolulu you have to prove that you are a bona fide resident of Hawaii because under the emergency conditions they would not otherwise bring you back. The best way to do that is for you to tell them that you're going to marry me." She said, "If you think that's what you'd like to do, I'll do that." So she did. Eventually she was able to return to Honolulu --three or four months later--on the convoy which had to go through a great deal of dodging back and forth across the Pacific to avoid Japanese submarines.

S: Well, you were a bachelor for a long time.

D: Yes, thirty-five years. Then we were divorced eight years later and I was a bachelor again for damn near twenty years. (laughs) I got married again and then we were divorced--so now I'm a happy man again.

S: You've finally figured out that your role in life is
probably that of a bachelor. (laughs)

D: I think so. Probably, but you can never tell.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

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THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Watumull Foundation Oral History Project began in June of 1971. During the following seventeen months eighty-eight people were taped. These tapes were transcribed but had not been put in final form when the project was suspended at the end of 1972.

In 1979 the project was reactivated and the long process of proofing, final typing and binding began. On the fortieth anniversary of the Watumull Foundation in 1982 the completed histories were delivered to the three repositories.

As the value of these interviews was realized, it was decided to add to the collection. In November of 1985 Alice Sinesky was engaged to interview and edit thirty-three histories that have been recorded to mark the forty-fifth anniversary of the Foundation.

The subjects for the interviews are chosen from all walks of life and are people who are part of and have contributed to the history of Hawaii.

The final transcripts, on acid-free Permalife bond paper and individually Velo-bound, are deposited and are available to scholars and historians at the Hawaii State Archives, the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawaii and the Cooke Library at Punahou School. The tapes are sealed and are not available.

August 1987